

E-mentoring as a Means to Develop and Retain Expatriate Managers

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As globalization increases, many corporations are faced with sending managers to foreign countries. With the increase in expatriate managers, a critical issue must be addressed – the high failure rate of expatriates. The literature shows mentoring to be a critical component in developing and retaining expatriate managers. The growing discipline of e-mentoring is proposed as a possible means to satisfy the need for mentoring, ultimately playing a role in the reduction of the failure rate.

Keywords: E-mentoring, Expatriate, Mentoring

As globalization continues to increase, many corporations are faced with sending managers to foreign countries as part of the corporations' operations. As the growth in the number of expatriate managers continues, a critical issue must be addressed – the high failure rate of expatriates. Black and Gregersen (1999) highlighted some startling facts:

1. Nearly one-third of U.S. expatriate managers fail to meet the performance expectations of their superiors.
2. One-fifth of all U.S. expatriate managers return early due to job dissatisfaction or trouble adjusting to the foreign country.
3. One-fourth of U.S. expatriate managers completing a foreign assignment left their company within one year after repatriation.

This high failure rate of expatriates is costly to corporations. In his textbook on international business, Hill (1997) states:

Between 16 to 40 percent of all the American employees sent abroad return from their assignments early and each premature return costs over \$100,000. In addition, approximately 30 to 50 percent of American expatriates, whose average compensation package runs to \$250,000 per annum, stay at their international assignments but are considered ineffective or marginally effective (p. 522).

The high cost of failure is more than financial. According Ashamalla and Crocitto (1997), the costs of failure also include lost time, lost business opportunities, damaged relationships with foreign stakeholders and potentially a damaged reputation in the regional area.

This is an initial exploratory review of the literature. In reviewing the literature, the author started with the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Mentoring plays an important role in the development and retention of expatriate managers.

Hypothesis 2: E-mentoring can help play a needed role in reducing the failure rate of expatriate managers.

The stakes are high. Differential competitive advantages in the twenty-first century will in part be a result of corporations' abilities to develop and retain a globally effective workforce (Harvey, Speier & Novicevic, 1999). The training and development literature over the last twenty-five years, especially the 1990s, introduced new research on the need to train and prepare expatriate managers. This paper takes a look at one aspect of the findings on training and developing expatriate managers, mentoring. Expatriate satisfaction, and ultimately success, is attributable to a variety of factors. Mentoring programs were one of the many success factors identified (Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Feldman & Thompson, 1993).

Due to globalization, HRD professionals are increasingly responsible for developing and retaining expatriate managers. Reviewing the mentoring of expatriate managers is complementary to expatriate training (Cavusgil, Yavas & Bykowicz, 1992; Tung, 1998; Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1999). In a study by Feldman and Thompson (1992), it recommended that organizations develop mentoring relationships between expatriates and people in the corporate headquarters to facilitate social support, information exchange and career advice. However, their study found that only 30% of the organizations practice this HR item. This data is consistent with Shumsky's (1993) report that expatriates receive little mentoring or career advice. Yet, there is an absence in the literature addressing why mentoring expatriate managers is not more prevalent. One assumption made by the author is that the geographic distances between expatriates and possible mentors creates a potential difficulty in providing the level of mentoring needed. The growing discipline of e-mentoring might be a possible means of increasing the quantity of mentoring available, while reducing costs. As such, e-mentoring, which may augment traditional mentoring, is an important area of study in the HRD field.

Research Methodology

In order to research the stated hypotheses, an exploratory review of the literature was conducted in May 2006. The ProQuest database available at Indiana State University was used to conduct the literature review. In searching the database, a limitation was placed to only return articles identified in “scholarly journals, including peer-reviewed”. Table 1 outlines the search terms and strings used and the number of articles that resulted from the search for review:

Table 1: *Search Terms/Strings and Resulting Articles*

Search Terms and Strings	Number of Articles for Review
Expatriation	136
Expatriate managers	202
Training AND expatriate	207
Mentoring AND “expatriate managers”	1
Mentoring AND expatriate	9
Mentor AND expatriate	11
E-mentoring	13
Electronic AND mentoring	17
Cyber-mentoring	0
Tele-mentoring	13
Online AND mentoring	33
Virtual mentoring	12
Mentoring	1914
• Due to the volume of articles returned, this search was further narrowed (see next string) based on suggestion made in ProQuest.	
Mentoring AND “professional development”	208

For each article returned in the search, a review of the citation and abstract was conducted to determine applicability to the hypotheses being investigated. If an article appeared to have applicability, a full review of the article was completed. This process resulted in 61 articles to be fully reviewed. Additionally, references cited within the 61 articles that proved to have direct applicability to the hypotheses were also collected and reviewed as well.

Need for Mentoring

Expatriate managers have complex jobs (Tung, 1981) requiring them to be effective across multiple cultural contexts simultaneously (Morris & Robie, 2001). The diverse context and unique work patterns of expatriate managers resulting from their cross-cultural setting may require different training methodologies to adequately prepare the employee (Morris & Robie, 2001). One important methodology involves ongoing mentoring during the foreign assignment. A couple studies have suggested the use of mentoring for expatriates since it has assisted in the socialization, development, and retention of U.S. employees (Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Harvey & Wiese, 1998).

In Beitler and Frady’s “Expatriate Manager Assessment and Development” model (2001), they identify that the pre-departure phase is only the beginning of training and development for the expatriate manager. The expatriate manager will need to develop additional knowledge, skills and attitudes after arriving in the host country, requiring ongoing support from the corporation. This ongoing support requires some form of mentoring relationship or relationships be established with the expatriate manager. This need for mentoring is partially due to the fact that expatriates are removed from their normal support networks while on assignment (Oddou, 1991; Heimann and Pittenger, 1996; Ragins, 1997).

In the literature, mentoring is associated with many positive benefits. Table 2 outlines many of the benefits of mentoring within the literature.

Mentoring is also expected to enhance expatriates’ job satisfaction. Feldman and Thompson (1993) determined that various corporate career development programs, including mentorship, contributed significantly to several aspects of expatriation satisfaction. The benefits of mentoring shown in Table 2 provide an insight into why mentoring might enhance expatriates’ job satisfaction. Feldman and Bolino (1999) showed that onsite mentoring had a positive relationship with expatriate adjustment, which in turn has a positive relationship with job satisfaction. These findings are further supported in the mentoring literature which shows that mentored individuals report higher

mjob satisfaction, compensation, promotion, and organizational commitment (Roche, 1979; Kram, 1985; Fagenson, 1988, 1989; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991; Scandura, 1992; Scandura & Viator, 1994; Allen, Russell, & Maetzke, 1997).

Table 2: *Key Benefits Associated with Mentoring*

Benefit	Literature Reference
Helps provides psychosocial support	Kram, 1983; Allen, Russell & Maetzke, 1997; McManus & Russell, 1997; Allen, McManus & Russell, 1999; Feldman & Bolino, 1999; Ensher, Thomas & Murphy, 2001; McDonald, 1993
Helps reduce stress	Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Scandura & Siegel, 1995; Webb, 1996; Swaak, 1997; Harvey & Wiese, 1998; Siegel, 2000; Vermond, 2001
Helps with socialization	Oddou, 1991; Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Harvey & Wiese, 1998; Feldman and Bolino, 1999
Helps with development	Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson & McKee, 1978; Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Harvey & Wiese, 1998
Helps with retention	Feldman, 1991; Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Feldman and Thompson, 1993; Harvey & Wiese, 1998; Feldman and Bolino, 1999
Helps adjustment to assignment	Morrison, 1993; Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1993; Heimann & Pittenger, 1996; Harvey & Wiese, 1998
Helps increase commitment	Nelson and Quick, 1991; Baker, 1995; Feldman & Bolino, 1999
Helps support cross-cultural training	Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Black, 1992; Black and Gregersen, 1991; Tung, 1998; Feldman and Bolino, 1999

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With expatriate protégés, mentors are often former expatriates who have likely returned to the parent company. In many cases, the mentor has successfully completed an assignment in the same location to where the protégé is assigned, and provides a link back to corporate in both a practical and a psychological sense (Downes, Thomas & Singley 2002). In Shim and Paprock's study on American expatriates learning in the host country (2002), they suggested that providing cultural mentors and providing information about the host country could enhance the expatriates' adjustment to the setting and help their job performance. Expatriates who adjust well have a higher likelihood of completing their assignments (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992).

All these potential benefits have led some to call for the assigning of mentors (McDonald, 1993). Despite the potential benefits though, the literature regarding the role of mentoring internationally is not well developed (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz & Lima, 2004). Through this exploratory search, there was much discussion about the need and importance of mentoring, but there was very little regarding the methods of implementing mentoring programs. Although several recommended practices are discussed in the literature, there is little consistency in the recommendations and little empirical evidence supporting them.

The most frequent recommended practice is that communication links to home office need to be maintained to help prevent feelings of being cut off from the corporation (Cavusgil, Yavas and Bykowicz, 1992; McDonald, 1993). The mentoring program's goal should be to "plug in" the expatriate to domestic company operations and build the employee's confidence in the importance of the overseas assignment (Cavusgil et al. 1992; McDonald, 1993). The results of Oddou's (1991) survey of expatriates agrees, finding that one of the most effective practices in support of expatriates in their foreign assignment is regular contact in order to exchange information and allow an avenue for discussion of potential problems and future plans. The expatriates surveyed felt a carefully selected mentor assigned to the expatriate at both the domestic and foreign site to act as a liaison, listening ear and counselor was required for more effective preparation (Oddou, 1991). Maintaining communication channels is also identified as a key part of any repatriation plan to alleviate repatriation problems (Harvey, 1989; Porter & Tansky, 1999).

Again, while frequent communication with expatriates is seen as important, the literature on the subject remains underdeveloped (Suutari & Brewster, 2001)

In summary, the literature supports the first hypothesis, identifying mentoring as a critical aspect of developing and retaining expatriate managers. Mentoring not only plays a role in training for specific tasks but it also plays a role in enhancing job satisfaction. Improving, both aspects of the expatriate managers' jobs, performance and satisfaction, should play a role in increasing the success rate of expatriate managers. The literature in mentoring of expatriates still remains relatively absent.

E-mentoring Expatriate Managers

Mentoring programs are difficult to start and maintain due to the geographic locations of the expatriate managers in relation to available mentors. Due to this, mentoring must become e-mentoring (Beitler & Frady, 2001). The digital communication technology available today provides an opportunity to overcome the problem of location, with access to technologies like e-mail, online chat (text, voice and video), discussion boards, listservs, newsgroups, and virtual offices. The potential advantages of e-mentoring are only theoretical at this point. Only Beitler and Frady (2001) were found to have pursued the concept of e-mentoring expatriate managers in their "Expatriate Manager Assessment and Development" model. Yet, there study provided no empirical evidence to support their model. No other studies regarding e-mentoring of expatriate managers was identified. Despite the lack of literature on the subject, a review of the e-mentoring literature was still conducted to identify potential benefits that might guide further research. The following discussion is an overview of the e-mentoring literature that was identified.

A definition of e-mentoring, also referred to as cyber-mentoring, tele-mentoring and online mentoring, is required. It can not be assumed that e-mentoring is the same as traditional face-to-face mentoring. Although e-mentoring relationships draw inspirations from traditional mentoring relationships and can attempt to emulate them in many ways, they develop differently and serve different needs (O'Neil & Harris, 2004). For instance, because e-mail lacks the full spectrum of visual and auditory cues that people depend upon (often unconsciously) in face-to-face conversation (Sproul & Kiesler, 1993), e-mail mentoring requires different interaction strategies than face-to-face mentoring to create optimum benefit. For example, more frequent and more explicit purpose setting, progress reporting and problem solving communication may be necessary online than face-to-face (Kimball & Eunice, 1999).

The literature review produced several varying definitions of e-mentoring. The definition of e-mentoring adopted for this paper is a modification of Zey's (1984) definition of mentoring. E-mentoring is "a computer-mediated, mutually beneficial relationship between a mentor and a protégé which provides learning, advising, encouraging, promoting and modeling that is often boundaryless, egalitarian and qualitatively different than traditional face-to-face mentoring" (Bierema & Merriam, 2002, p. 214).

Regardless of the technology employed, a model of e-mentoring must at a minimum meet the basic requirements already in existence for mentoring in general to be deemed effective. Existing literature suggests a few common requirements for building a sound mentoring relationship:

1. One-to-one relationship (Krueger Wilson, 1998; McManus & Russell, 1997; Mech, Pryde & Rycraft, 1995; O'Neill, Wagner & Gomez, 1996; Stokes, 2001; Tabbron, Macauley & Cook, 1997; Woodd, 1999)
2. Mutual respect, trust, and comfort are essential components of this relationship and must be allowed to evolve naturally (Bierema & Merriam, 2002).
3. Both parties must be committed to the relationship (Bierema & Merriam, 2002).
4. Involves an extended relationship (Tabbron et al. 1997);
5. Involves frequent and regular interaction (Bierema & Merriam, 2002).
6. Relationship should be confidential and protected (Collins, 1979).
7. Expectations must be articulated (Bierema & Merriam, 2002).
8. Should be focused on growth and development of the individual rather than just performance (Collins, 1979; Knouse, 2001; Krueger Wilson, 1998; McManus & Russell, 1997; Mech et al., 1995; Tabbron et al., 1997).

One component found necessary to a rewarding mentoring relationship is easy and frequent interaction and communication (Bierema & Merriam, 2002). Periodic communication and follow up are very important to help the expatriate manager feel connected. Frequent exchanges can occur via e-mail (Purcell, 2004). However, Bierema and Merriam (2002) also recommend utilizing a mixture of communication mediums such as faxes, telephone calls and even snail mail.

Mueller (2004) notes that computer-mediated mentoring offers three areas of advantages over face-to-face mentoring: logistical, qualitative and managerial. Logistical advantages over face-to-face results from the two parties not needing to be at the same location or even live in the same geographical area. Qualitative advantages are

provided by the asynchronous nature, allowing flexibility and convenience not available with fixed face-to-face meeting times. Also, e-mentoring is often text based, providing a written record that can be used to review what has been achieved and identify any unresolved questions. Managerial advantages are provided due to the reduced costs and the ease of scalability.

Additional benefits to e-mentoring may actually result from the lack of face-to-face communication. E-mentoring holds the potential to erode some of the traditional power dynamics that tend to structure mentoring relationships (Bierema & Merriam, 2002). Sproul and Kiesler (1993) have suggested that markers of social status are less visible in electronic communication, thus rendering them less important to the overall exchange.

E-mail appears to be the most commonly used communication technology at this time. The literature provided both benefits and limitations for the use of e-mail in an e-mentoring relationship. E-mail is good for posing and answering simple questions, sending documents back and forth for review and editing, providing links to articles or other information on the Web for reading, and scheduling and planning meetings (Ambrose, 2003). E-mail is not a good forum for giving critical feedback or commenting on impressions of each other's knowledge, skills, abilities, values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (Ambrose, 2003). The majority of the recommendations included the use of the telephone, specifically because the telephone affords certain audible cues that are not available in e-mail. Ambrose (2003) recommends listening during phone conversations for any nonverbal cues (e.g. sigh, pause or hesitation, raising or lowering of voice, silence) that signal a change in mood (Ambrose, 2003). With the capability for online voice chat worldwide, the need for and cost of telephones may be eliminated, but the principles outlined by Ambrose (2003) still apply. Lastly, e-mail may pose a problem in the area of confidentiality, since a single click of the mouse can forward a message to anyone (Purcell, 2004).

E-mentoring is not without its challenges. Bierema and Merriam (2002) identify four challenges with e-mentoring: (1) participation requires computer access and computer literacy, (2) virtual intimacy may be difficult to develop if the two parties have never met in person, (3) making virtual matches requires several attempts and (4) miscommunication can occur on a number of levels in e-mentoring, especially if the parties have only a virtual relationship with frail commitment. Mueller (2004) identified the same potential for miscommunication due to the lack of nonverbal cues available. Mueller (2004) also recognized the possibility of slower development of the relationship. The last major challenge identified was that if the computers or communication technology delivery systems break, communication is halted (Mueller, 2004).

In summary, there is no support for hypothesis 2 in the literature. While there may be potential benefits provided by e-mentoring expatriate managers, there is no literature to either support or deny the existence of the potential.

Conclusion

The high failure rate of expatriate managers requires the attention of corporations as they increasingly become more global. Mentoring is a critical factor in the development and retention of expatriate managers, and ultimately plays a role in the successful completion of their foreign assignment and repatriation. Significant further research is required in the mentoring methodologies employed. While e-mentoring may provide additional benefits on top of traditional mentoring programs, research in this area is not developed and is needed before any conclusions can be drawn.

Future Research

The current literature provides a lot of attention to expatriates. A significant amount of information regarding the need for mentoring of expatriate managers exists. However, there is very little direction on how to structure an international mentoring program. Additionally, the logistics of operating an international mentoring program were lacking. To further the study of mentoring expatriates and add to the HRD field, research in these areas is needed.

There is no existing significant research in the area of e-mentoring expatriate managers. It seems logical to the author that e-mentoring could play a needed role in reducing the failure rate of expatriate managers. Research in this area needs to be developed to determine if any benefits exist. It is suggested that Beitler and Frady's (2001) "Expatriate Manager Assessment and Development" model be used as the basis for a comprehensive study. Future studies should build on the importance of mentoring to the overall success of expatriate managers.

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